

Webster to fire two FBI agents

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By JAMES H. RUBIN

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Director William H. Webster said Tuesday he will fire two FBI agents for their part in conducting allegedly illegal surveillance against the radical Weather Underground in the early 1970s, but will take no action against 59 other agents.

In addition to firing two agents, the director announced he will demote one agent and suspend one for 30 days. All four had supervisory responsibility, Webster said.

He also said he will reprimand two street agents who conducted unauthorized surveillance against the Weather Underground.

Webster said he decided against any discipline for 59 other agents, including one supervisor, on grounds they were acting under orders from superiors and without clear legal guidance from FBI headquarters or the Justice Department.

"It seems clear to me that to discipline the street agents at this late date for acts performed under supervision and without needed legal guidance from FBI headquarters and the Department of Justice would wholly lack any therapeutic value either as a personal deterrent or as an example to others," Webster told a news conference. "It would be counterproductive and unfair."

Webster announced the results of an investigation of 68 agents and supervisors accused of involvement in breakins, wiretaps and mail openings that were intended to ferret out Weather Underground fugitives between 1970 and 1975.

The remaining three FBI agents involved in the investigation have retired and are beyond disciplinary action.

Three former ranking FBI officials — former Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III and two of his top aides — are to stand trial next month on charges they conspired to violate the civil rights of friends and relatives of Weather Underground members by authorizing the surveillance.

Webster said he hoped his decision would resolve the trauma that the Weather Underground case has caused the FBI.

"The lessons have been learned," he said. "The bureau is committed to doing

its duty under guidelines which fully protect today's perceptions of privacy and reasonableness."

The four supervisors who were disciplined have 10 days to appeal to Webster to reconsider his decision. After that, if Webster stands by his action, they can take their cases to court and three of them who are veterans may appeal to the Civil Service Commission.

Webster withheld the names of all 68 on grounds it would violate their privacy rights to make any names public. But the identities of some of the agents could come out if there are appeals.

Webster, a former judge who has been FBI director for nine months, described his investigation as an arduous one which involved him emotionally.

"I do consider myself a member of this family," he said. But he said he would have taken the same steps if he had been an outsider.

Most of the activities against the Weather Underground were conducted by the so-called Squad 47 in the New York field office. The FBI was seeking fugitive members of the organization which claimed responsibility for more than 35 bombings against such targets as the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, law enforcement agencies and corporate buildings.

Webster said the FBI is still looking for eight or nine Weather Underground fugitives. He described the organization as "the closest thing we have in the United States to international terrorism."

In pardoning the conduct of 59 of the agents under investigation, Webster said the bureau was under extraordinary pressure to find and arrest the fugitives.